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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5440  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000714

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2018

TAGS: PTER PGOV SY

SUBJECT: SARG RAIDS SUSPECTED TERRORIST CELL

REF: A. DAMASCUS 679

¶B. DAMASCUS 678

Classified By: CDA Maura Connolly for reasons 1.5 b and d.

¶11. (C) Embassy contacts reported that Syrian security and police services raided a suspected "terrorist" cell on Octobter 9, killing three suspected terrorists and wounding one while suffering one police fatality. The incident took place in the unofficial Yarmouk Palestinian camp, located approximately eight kilometers south of Damascus. (Note: Yarmouk resembles an urban quarter with a mixed population of Palestinians, Iraqis and low-income Syrians. While containing the largest number of Palestinians in Syria, it bears little resemblance to other Palestinian camps, which have defined perimeter walls. End Note.) Diplomatic contacts have also reported that an unexploded car bomb was found in the course of this raid along with weapons and explosive belts. One diplomatic contact noted that this "terrorist cell" had been under security service surveillance since the September 27 bombing in Damascus (Ref A). According to his local source, the suspected terrorist cell numbered around 24 members but we have heard nothing so far about any additional arrests. Syrian press has been mute on this subject though there have been some scattered reports on other Arabic networks.

¶12. (C) Director of UNRWA Affairs Syria Panos Mountzis reported that this incident took place in close proximity to an UNRWA Palestinian school. Mountzis received a call around 1530 local time October 9 from the school's headmaster, who informed Mountzis that a "fire-fight" was taking place just outside the school. Mountzis added that he received a call roughly an hour later from the head-master who indicated that the situation appeared to be under control, but there were dead and wounded just outside the school. According to Mountzis the area around the incident was cordoned off, though the security services did eventually allow for an orderly release of the Palestinian students to their parents.

Though Mountzis noted that the suspected terrorists were not Palestinians from the camp, he had no information as to the nationality of the suspected terrorists.

¶13. (C) Comment: This raid is likely to have been carried out in response to the September 27 bombing of a Syrian security service building. Though the SARG and its media proxies had portrayed the bombing as an attack against innocent civilians, never mentioning the deaths and injuries sustained by the security services, this raid suggests that the SARG may perceive this group as a threat to regime stability.

CONNELLY